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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the dominant view from which child development is currently taught, examining the impact of culture on the developing child and offering a rationale for shifting paradigms toward a more inclusive framework of instruction. The dominant framework presents child development from a middle class white, generally western, paradigm. Culture is an important contributor to child development. Many aspects of culture represent adaptation to the environment in which the group lives. Though developmental processes (physical, affective, and social) probably emerge in a similar fashion across races, developmental differentiation beyond that related to constitutionally based individual differences is largely a function of the dynamic interaction between the child and both proximal and distal ecologies. Course content that considers child development from a multicultural perspective has several advantages for preservice teachers, diverse children, and society. For student teachers, it means increased effectiveness as teachers. For children, it means valuing of their worth as individuals and group members. For society, it means raised consciousness, which can affect social decisions made on behalf of children. A description of a course, Child Development: A Multicultural Perspective, is included. (Contains 22 references.) (SM)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF COURSE CONTENT: TEACHING CHILD DEVELOPMENT FROM A MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE-FOCUS ON AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

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The Development of Course Content: Teaching Child Development from a Multicultural Perspective: Focus on African American Children

The study of children is foundational in the curricula of the various disciplines that concern children. A course in child development or human growth and development may be found in courses of study for human science fields: teacher preparation programs at all levels (early childhood, elementary, secondary), psychology, pediatrics, nursing, sociology, social work, and/or anthropology. The rationale for such course content varies, however central to all is the goal of providing information that is applicable to the interaction with and/or planning for children in one's chosen career or vocation. Individual programs of study might require early childhood development (conception through age eight), child and adolescent development (conception through the teen years), or a lifespan course (conception to old age and dying). This paper addresses the dominant view from which child development is currently taught. Secondly, the

impact of culture on the developing child is presented. The paper concludes with rationale for making a paradigm shift toward more inclusive framework of instruction.

1. Dominant framework from which child development is taught

Development is defined as change over time in the basic domains of physical, psychosocial, and cognition which often incorporates the development of language. Central to the study of development are specific variables that affect change toward optimal behavior or performance or toward negative or deficient behavior or performance. The typical textbook of child development presents the course of development from a middle class Caucasian, generally Western, paradigm. Consequently, the parameters of normalcy are the gauges obtained from research findings on the Caucasoid group. Such parameters are theorized in the works of such noted researchers as Erik Erikson, Arnold Gesell, Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, Urie Bronfenbrenner, J.B. Watson, and B.F. Skinner.

Though there remains controversy regarding the primacy of nature as opposed to nurture, many researchers agree that development is influenced by multiple factors (Berk, 1999, p. 8). The nature argument purports that the biological inheritance expressed phenotypically in physical, psychosocial, and cognitive characteristics is present at birth and is subject to very little change (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994, Jensen, 1969). The nurture argument, conversely, states that the dominant contributor to ones developmental outcome is ones environment and its myriad components (Bronfenbrenner & Mahoney, 1975, Hilliard, III, 1992, Kinsler & Joyner, 1993, Garcia Coll, 1996). The degree to which the multiple factors contribute to the outcome of one's development is, also debated by those who study development.

II. Impact of culture on development

Current brain research findings, made possible by technological advances, confirm changes in brain development. Infants are born with approximately 250,000 neurons. Neurons which have axons, and dendrites, which

potentiate the functioning of the neuron, make connections between the neurons. Central to the connections (or wiring) is environmental stimulation. This environment affects how genes work (Brandt, 1998, p. 10) which is exhibited as behavior.

One of the multiple environmental contributors to child development is culture. Culture represents a "group's preferred way of perceiving, judging, and organizing the ideas, situations and events they encounter in their daily lives" (Shade, 1974, p. 5). The group's values, belief, customs, attitudes, mores, and artifacts are unique to it and are expressed in the group's religion, music, dance, socialization patterns, childrearing, and recreation. Culture is learned behavior that is passed down from older members of the group to younger members of the group.

Many aspects of culture are the result of adaptation to the environment in which the group lives. Noticeable influences on culture are climate with its demands, and sociological/historical factors such as economics, social status, and political climate. Cultural beliefs did not develop illogically notes Slonim (1991) rather, they

evolved as practices deemed necessary for survival and represent an organized blend of human effort, feeling, and thought...Of importance to African American culture over time have been sociological/historical factors of oppression, discrimination and isolation.

As seen in groups of people around the world African Americans have adapted to their environment and have consequently developed a unique culture. Within the African American culture, as in other culture groups, is tremendous heterogeneity. It is also important to state that African Americans also take on many of the cultural behaviors of the Hegemonic society. As acknowledged by Boykin and Toms (cited in McAdoo & McAdoo, 1985, p. 38)...no one ignores that Afro-Americans participate to some degree in the cultural systems and institutions of mainstream American society.

In her book, *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles* Hale-Benson (1982) discusses the thesis of how culture shapes cognition. A review of the work of some noted researchers Hale-Benson concludes that "Black people participate in a coherent culture that

shapes their cognitive development and affects the way they approach academic tasks..."(p. 21). Other writers (Comer and Poussaint, Wilson, Blake , Shade) support this conclusion.

Differences among culture groups in the physical and psychosocial domains are described by writers who take a more holistic view of development. The work of Amos Wilson (1991), Helen Bee (1999), Trawick-Smith (1997), citing the work of Ainsworth, Brazelton, Koslowski & Tronick, Gerber & Dean, Rosser & Rudolph give the reader some insight into the variation in the physical development of African American children. The more salient variation is that of motor precociousness of African Americans from infancy. Variations in psychosocial patterns are found in the work of Slonim (1991), Ladson-Billings (1994), Spencer & Markstrom-Adams (1990), Comer and Poussaint, 1992, Hale-Benson (1984), Garcia Coll (1996). The nature of social interaction and style of relating to the world is described as feeling-oriented and people- oriented as opposed to an object oriented. There is, additionally, a tendency to use a high preponderance of

nonverbal communication in self expression and to be skilled in reading and interpreting nonverbal behavior of others.

Garcia Coll (1996) notes that there is no theoretical or empirical reason to assume that individual primary developmental processes operate differently for children of color than for Caucasian children in Western society. Developmental processes (physical, affective, and social) probably emerge in a similar fashion across racially and ethnically diverse populations. However, developmental differentiation, beyond that related to constitutionally based individual differences, is largely a function of the dynamic interaction between the child and both proximal and distal ecologies (p. 1893).

III. Paradigm shift to a more inclusive framework

Course content that looks at child development from a multicultural perspective has several advantages for the student of child development, children from diverse cultures, and society. Implications for the student of child development include 1). increased effectiveness in the

chosen field of work. For example, as teachers become sensitive to and skilled in understanding the cultural influences of development on behavior there is a greater likelihood of teacher-student congruence(Lason-Billings, 1994, 16). This matching of cognitive learning style and teaching style results in success for all; teaching is more effective and learning takes place. 2). Children from diverse cultures will benefit from the cultural perspective in that their self-worth as individuals and as group members is valued. Instruction and assessment that utilize the developmental milestones and parameters that have been established according to the norms of the child's reference group are likely to produce accurate results. An accurate picture of the child is then obtained allowing for a more accurate determination of which behaviors are different and those behaviors which are deviant. Comer and Poussaint (1992) states that many psychological tests, standardized on white people, are inappropriately applied to blacks, causing them to appear less intelligent or deficient (p. 15). Another benefit to children results from a sense of empowerment felt by their parents. When the parameters(norms) are

culturally specific, group members are more likely to feel that they and their children are capable of succeeding. Parents, then, see the value of encouraging and motivating their children. 3.) Ensuring that schools are ready for children is a benefit to society when child development is culturally bounded. One reason for studying child development is to impact the society's decisions made on behalf of children. Decisions are made by many institutions such as legislative, educational, religious and recreational. There is a concerted effort across the states to ensure that children, especially the "at-risk children" enter the school system ready to learn. The focus here is that children entering kindergarten for the first time will have foundational physical, psychosocial, and cognitive skills that will promote success with the school's curriculum. This is an admirable goal, however, an important calory is that schools-administration, staff, and, teachers become "ready for children". This means that the school works with the child in the context of his or her family. Cultural variables brought to school by the child from their

respective home environments are respected and endeared. Success of the school and the child follows.

Concluding discussion notes that the current body of literature is scant in data that conceptualizes or systematizes cross-cultural development in the physical, psychological, and cognitive domains. A transdisciplinary approach to the resolution of this issue would be most approach. Scholars in the fields of education, psychology, sociology, and anthropology must cooperate to conceptualize current data. Utilizing the qualitative approach to research is appropriate and is likely to produce data that will be very useful to those who use child development data.

Reorganization of higher education course curriculum then utilizes this data in classrooms. "If the changes are to occur, they must begin with teacher preparation programs, continue with the hiring process to ensure that the teachers who can meet the challenges are members of today's faculties, and lead to staff development programs to help teachers become aware and implement the new approaches(Shade, 1997, p. 224)".

Course Title: Child Development: A Multicultural Perspective

Course Credits: 3 Hrs. (Graduate)

Course Description:

This course, covering the early childhood period will assess research writings and empirical studies on development from a multicultural perspective. The cultural-different mode of looking at physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development, as opposed to the deficit-mode will be emphasized. Students are expected to conduct research projects, including observational research, and present position papers.

Competencies

Specialization/Educators' Certification in Florida

#1-Child Growth and Development- Understands growth and development from conception to age eight (8)

Educator' Accomplished Practices

5- Diversity- Uses teaching and learning strategies that reflect each students' culture, learning styles, special needs, and socioeconomic background

#7-Human Development and Learning- Uses an understanding of learning and human development to provide a positive learning environment which supports the intellectual, personal, and social development of all students.

8- Knowledge of Subject Matter- Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the subject matter

Generic Essential Competencies

#1.1 Professional Skills: Recognizes patterns of physical, social, and academic development of students in the classroom including those with exceptionalities

#2- Enhances students' feelings of dignity and self-worth

15- communicates effectively using verbal and non-verbal skills

NAEYC/NCATE

#1.0 Child Development and Learning-Extend knowledge and understanding of research on social, emotional, cognitive, language, aesthetic, motor, and perceptual development and learning in children from birth through age eight, including children with special developmental and learning needs and their families; and understand the child in the family and cultural context

CEC

#2-S4 Apply knowledge of cultural and linguistic diversity and the significance of sociocultural and political contexts for development and learning

Instructional Strategies

The seminar format will be utilized as the primary instructional strategy. The format is augmented by use of appropriate video, small and large presentations. Students are expected to have read all reading assignments prior to class and to actively participate in seminar each class period.

Major Topics and Required Readings

I. Physical and Motor Development

Prenatal influences: health care, cultural beliefs

Impact of Poverty on Physical and Motor Development

Motor precociousness

Movement and Learning

"Movement and Learning" E. Jensen Chapter 7

"Waking the Natural Genius of Black Children" A. Wilson

II. Cognition and Language Development and Use

Factors that Influence Cognitive Style

Preferred Learning Style

Emerging language and literacy

"Child Development and Differential School Performance"

K. Kinsler & E. Joyner Educational Horizons

"Behavioral Style, Culture, and Teaching and Learning"

A. Hilliard, III Journal of Negro Education

"Black children: Their roots, culture, and learning styles"

J. Hale-Benson

III. Psychosocial Development

Impact of Parent-Infant interaction: attachment and bonding

Development of Self-Concept-influential factors

Care giving Patterns

"The Cultural Context of Infant Caregiving"

N.P. Bhavnagri & Gonzales-Mena Childhood Education

"Characteristics of Black Infant Attachment behaviors"

J. Jackson American Journal of Social Psychiatry

"Infants at Social Risk: Maternal Depression and Family Support Services as Mediators of Infant Development and Security of Attachment"

K. Lyons-Ruth Child Development

IV. Physical, Cognitive, and Psychosocial

"Raising Black Children" J.P. Comer & Comer,

J. P. & A. F. Poussaint

"Black children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles. "An integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children"

C. Garcia Coll Child Development

"Black Families" H. McAdoo

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